



Anna Kopytov

“The Jewish Agency brought about a renaissance of Jewish identity in Gomel, Belarus after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Suddenly our community came alive with holiday celebrations and Jewish learning. For the young people, going to Israel was our chance for a better future.”

Anna Kopytov's mother married a Russian man so her children would not suffer from anti-Semitism as she did. Until the age of nine, Anna, now 28, was an exemplary Soviet child, and had no idea of her Jewish identity. "There were signs, but as a child I wasn't sure what they meant," recalls Anna. "Like my grandfather's name Zalman, and my grandparents speaking in Yiddish."

With the fall of the Soviet Union, Anna's life was transformed. "My mother told us we were Jewish, and other families were also admitting this. The Jewish Agency came and opened Sunday schools, and youth clubs and organized incredible Jewish holiday celebrations. I call this time the 'Golden Age of the Gornal Jewish Community'," says Anna.

In 1995, Anna and her sister saw an ad for the Naaleh program for teenagers to go to Israel on their own. Anna's sister went first and then Anna followed a year later. Anna gives thanks everyday that she came to Israel with Naaleh. For her and the thousands of other teenagers who came on the program, it was truly a springboard to a better life. "Almost our whole group graduated high school, went to the army, got their degrees at excellent universities and is now raising families and starting their careers. For us, Israel was truly a land of opportunity."

The Jewish Agency is funded by The Jewish Federations of North America, Keren Hayesod, major Jewish communities and federations, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, foundations and donors from Israel and around the world.



הדפוס בבית הדפוס של הסוכנות היהודית

Anna worked with new immigrant soldiers during her mandatory army service, and knew that she wanted to work in the field of aliyah. Following her army service she was a Jewish Agency counselor at a JCC summer camp in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where she discovered communities outside of Israel in which people were proud to be Jewish. She also returned to Russia and worked as a counselor in Jewish Agency summer camps. "I saw myself in these kids and I was determined to help them discover the significance of their heritage," says Anna.

Today, Anna is the coordinator of long term MASA programs for Russian-speakers at Israel Experience, a subsidiary of the Jewish Agency. "My work gives me so much satisfaction," says Anna with a smile. "These programs give every Jewish person the chance to live and experience real life in Israel, and feel the incredible spirit of the Jewish homeland."